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ABSTRACT

Literature that examines reasons for the underrepresentation of women in educational administration is reviewed in this paper. Some explanations include the circular phenomenon, in which the lack of female role models contributes to fewer women applicants, discrimination, an increase in the number of males entering the teaching field, and social norms for gender roles. Women's management styles tend to be more interactive and motivated by intrinsic rewards, and men tend to use controlling behaviors. The literature substantiates the idea that women possess the skills needed for effective administrative leadership, yet continue to be underrepresented in administrative positions. Inequalities can be addressed by providing mentoring opportunities, encouraging university collaboration, and changing society's misconceptions. (Contains 11 references.) (LMI)

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WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION– A DISAPPEARING CONSTRUCT

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There continues to be a great disparity in female representation in school administration when compared to the number of women educators as well as the number of female students in the American population. While many professional fields are showing increasing numbers of women entering managerial and executive positions, the same cannot be said for education [Lane and Whitaker, 1990].

Bagenstos [1987] found that data regarding the employment of women and minorities in educational administration after 1980 is difficult to find. This is largely because the Office of Civil Rights of the United States Department of Education ceased collecting data in that year. Still, anecdotal information suggests that improvement in the representation of women in education administration has occurred very slowly, and that the problem of under-representation remains.

There must be reasons why there is an under-representation of women in education administration. It is obvious that women have always held most of the teaching positions in the United States. It also should be obvious that they should aspire to enter the administrative ranks in a proportional rate.

It is asserted by some researchers that minorities do not aspire to administrative positions or apply for them because of the perception that the chances of being hired for such positions are low. That perception is possibly based on seeing the small number of females holding administrative positions. This is commonly

referred to as the circular phenomenon. In addition, some hold that because of the lack of role models in administrative positions, women need more psychological as well as financial support to maintain aspirations.

Another reason for the lack of female administrators may be due to blatant discrimination [Whitaker, 1990]. According to relevant data on the equality of opportunity in educational administration, one's sex, more than age, experience, background, or competence determines the role that an individual will hold in education [Lane, 1990].

Pavan and D'Angelo [1990] conducted a study on gender differences in the career paths of aspiring and incumbent educational administrators for line positions. The results indicated that two-thirds of the female educational administrative certificate holders were channelled into staff positions where their performance was directed by male line officers. The contributions of these women may remain largely unrecognized or undervalued because the organizations tend to recognize overall goal accomplishment, which is typically attributed to the line officer.

Women administrators, from 1910 until 1930, held more than half of the educational administrative and supervisory positions. The decline in that ratio has been steady from 1930 to date. It is noted that women tend to enter administrative positions at an older age then men. They generally teach longer before entering educational administration and are more likely to continue their education part-time while serving in administrative roles, and they tend to earn less money than men.

Brown [1989] holds that one of the reasons for the decreasing percent of women

holding educational administrative positions is the increase of males entering the teaching field during the past twenty years. With the higher number of males in the field, the pressure upon the status quo has had great impact upon the number of females entering the administrative ranks.

Whitaker and Lane [1990] stated that one of the largest factors that limit women's opportunity in educational administration is related to society's attitudes and perceptions. Society too often sees women in the traditional roles of mother and caretaker. As long as women confine themselves to the traditional role of teacher [caretaker], they are accepted readily into education. When they attempt to enter the ranks of the administrator, they step out of the traditional role and acceptance decreases.

These findings cannot be attributed to either an unwillingness of women to move or to extended absences due to female parental obligations [Tinsley, 1989]. It is apparent that administrators must examine their promotional policies and attitudes to determine whether opportunities for women to assume line positions are being provided.

Rosner [1991] conducted a survey to explore whether there was significant differences in management styles between male and female administrators. Reporting on the results of that survey, Rosner stated that women who have made it to the top often exhibit a far different leadership style then men in comparable positions. Men reported that they rely most upon the command-and-control style. Men are also more likely than women to rely on the power of their position within

the organization to get things done. Women, on the other hand, say that they opt for an interactive style of leadership, sharing power and enhancing other people's self worth.

Rosner theorized that the main reason for this difference is that today's top women executives grew up in the 1960's when women were either not expected to have careers or certainly to have different kinds from men. Therefore women's career paths have usually not included long tenures in positions with formal authority and ultimate control of resources. This lack of tenure has resulted in the development of a less-formal, power-sharing leadership style. Rosner held that this style of leadership is likely to gain a firm foothold in organizations that thrive on change, are growing quickly, or employ many educated professional people.

Mohapatra [1990] conducted a comparative study of public service values of women and minority public administrators and their respective counterparts, majority and male administrators. The resulted indicated that minority administrators felt that the general public was much more aware about the complexity of decision making in government agencies than did their majority counterparts. Minority administrators had less concern or public opinion regarding their agencies than did their majority counterparts. One of the components was that female administrators differed significantly from their male counterparts in four value areas. They felt to a greater degree than agencies should provide equal treatment for minorities and women. They disagreed to a greater extent that political influence was important for an agency to help a citizen. Women felt to a

greater degree that high quality services should be provided and democratic principles should be applied at the work place and when dealing with the public.

This study seems to generally indicate a more genuine effort on the part of women to do a job for the intrinsic rewards received and the belief in human worth and ability than their counterparts who might tend to be preoccupied with the extrinsic rewards received. Hein [1988] found that women seem to have some advantages over men in the area of administration. In a study of attitudinal perceptions of Colorado principals toward the capability of women in administration, it was summarized that women scored higher in most categories that are necessary in effective administration. The areas included: practicality, flexibility, forthrightness, ability to give constructive criticism, ability to exercise strong educational leadership, assuming responsibility, tactfulness and communication. Hein found that although women were perceived to be more capable by both male and female principals, males were still recommended more than females for administrative positions.

Given these qualities, there should have been a preference of female administrators over male administrators if an equal hiring yardstick were employed. However, Jacobson [1989] indicates that educational administration is becoming an increasingly male bastion. Martin and Grant [1990] surveyed 350 persons who completed requirements for principal certification in West Virginia between 1978 and 1985 in an attempt to determine what barriers to women existed. Fifty one percent of the females reported preferential hiring and promotion as a barrier as compared

to thirty-one percent of the males. Many women reported that there were not made aware of job openings in time. They also indicated that job qualifications asked for, yet not really seen as necessary for the position, eliminated many female applicants. Job descriptions were sometimes changed to fit the qualifications of their male counterparts. Many times job openings were not advertised but passed along by a 'good ol' boys network. Many women stated that they were denied interviews and if granted an interview, were often confronted with discriminatory situations and questions. Biases were also reported in the selection process. Males with less experience and training were selected over females who were more qualified. Some of the reasons given for the selection were gender biased.

Andrews and Basom [1990] conducted a study which concluded that the comparative effectiveness of elementary school principals according to gender and the cause of the discrepancy between the number of male and female principals in U. S. elementary schools. It was found that the factor accounting for the greatest difference in the displaying of instructional leadership was that of gender. Female principals spent 38.4 percent of their time on instructional leadership as compared to 21.8 percent by their male counterparts. It was reported that staff perceived females as instructional leaders more often than they do males. It was also found that female principals usually have more teaching experience before becoming a principal. They spend more time in instructional supervision and observation as well as the showing of more concern than males about the academic achievement of students and general knowledge of the curriculum. Female administrators often

value teacher productivity and exhibit a greater concern for individual differences and developmental problem in the students. They also offered more assistance to new teachers. Student morale usually appeared to be higher in schools with female principals. Parents also had more of a tendency to be more involved.

All of this evidence suggested that female administrators had the abilities needed for strong instructional leadership. Yet, the statistics show that there is a big difference in the percentage of female and male principals in the schools. The literature certainly points to the fact that women are grossly under-represented in school administration. Simultaneously, it substantiates the idea that women possess the abilities and skills needed to be as successful in these positions, if given an opportunity, than their male counterparts. In order for women to succeed in acquiring administrative positions, a commitment to advancement must be made. Women must have the proper credentials, understand the organizational and political structures and be willing to take risks [Tinsley, 1989]. In addition, women need opportunities to have mentoring relationships with an administrator. Universities should encourage women to enter administrative training programs and set up a partnership with local schools and offer a mentor program. Colleges could draw leaders from both genders and promote educational leadership.

Inequalities at the administrative level of education must be addressed. Examination is only the beginning. Research and educational must be continued to combat society's prejudice and ignorance about women and their full participation in society. By changing society's misconceptions about women in leadership roles, we will enhance our educational system.

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